

The Mobile Consumer and the **Right Response** to Responsive Design

Part I: The Rage on 'Responsive Design' Answers the Wrong Question

by Seth Kaplan

With people accessing the Internet from various devices, all of which vary in size, Responsive Web Design has become all the rage. As defined by Stanford University, Responsive Web Design refers to:

"A website that responds to the device that accesses it and delivers the appropriate output. Rather than designing multiple sites for different-sized devices, this approach designs one site, but specifies how it should appear on varied devices."

In essence, Responsive Web Design is a programmer's dream come true. Even Google, the world's premier programming organization, has deemed Responsive Web Design their "recommended configuration" for building smartphone-optimized websites. However, the problem with Responsive Web Design is that it aims to answer the wrong question: How do you display content correctly across different devices and screen sizes?

The question we should be asking is, how should we alter the user experience to accommodate changes in consumer behavior across different devices?

After all, what we do as marketers should be driven by consumers, not by what works best for programmers. And consumer behavior is changing rapidly. The shift is clear and can be seen through device sales alone, as people spend more time on mobile and tablets and less time on their personal computers. As such, their behavior is changing because of the mobility of the device. "We must en-

sure the experience on each device is built specifically to accommodate the user; our consumer," says John Lim, co-Founder and CEO of Life in Mobile, "as consumer behavior is inherently different when using a mobile phone compared to a desktop computer."

According to John Packes, co-founder/head of Innovation at Life in Mobile, "Responsive design is great for certain applications, such as simple static websites, basic administrative management panels and blogs. However, being a mobile company, we always take a mobile-first approach. We aim to create an experience that meets the needs of the consumer and satisfies the goals of our client, which is to get the consumer to the piece of information and/or the specific product or service he/she is looking for as quickly and efficiently as possible, creating the highest conversion opportunity for our client. Inserting code that delivers resized content across devices oftentimes is a cop-out. Just because the same



information displays on all devices doesn't necessarily mean you're delivering effective experiences across devices."

While recommending a responsive design configuration, Google "appreciates that for many situations, it may not be possible or appropriate to use Responsive Web Design," as noted in their recommendations for building smartphone-optimized websites blog post.

These are the same "situations" Packes refers to when referencing their "mobile-first approach." These are instances where a consumer's behavior will differ so dramatically from their desktop to their mobile devices, when the consumer transforms from passive to aggressive solely based on device type, warranting an experience all its own.

Before one can determine whether Responsive Web Design is an appropriate or inappropriate solution for their Web design needs, they must first ask: What do my consumers want when they're on their various devices?

In Part II, we'll examine what you need to know about Google's mobile SEO guidelines and why it doesn't matter to you. **RE**



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